

July 22, 2025

The Town of Bedford Select Board  
10 Mudge Way  
Bedford, MA 01730

### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

Dear Mr. Mortenson, Ms. Malone, Mr. Hanegan, Mr. Brosgol, and Mr. Parker:

Richard Hughes and I thank you and Matt Hanson once again for cordially listening to our remarks at the July 14<sup>th</sup> Select Board Meeting. After having gotten to “know” some of you through video or email over the past few years and shaking your hands last Monday, I feel that we are all on the same side, even though we are not on the same page.

However, when it comes to the bedrock importance of the Open Meeting Law there is no room for disagreement...

“The purpose of the Open Meeting Law is to ensure transparency in the deliberations on which public policy is based. Because the democratic process depends on the public having knowledge about the considerations underlying governmental action...” (Open Meeting Law Guide, 3/18/2015)

As I have explained, my research revealed that the Select Board never once discussed or even referred to the fire station project in a single regular or executive session in 2021 until the end of October. That means the site for the massive project was selected without any Board deliberations! A public policy went forward without the public having any knowledge about the considerations underlying the governmental action. And that bizarre fact is true to this day.

**If that doesn’t qualify as a colossal violation of the Open Meeting Law – and, consequently, the democratic process – then nothing would. Therefore, it is vital to ask what the project’s legitimacy is founded upon – and for all to hear the answer.**

So much focus was placed on the Historic District, and the pressing public interest in having a first-rate fire station, that the highest public good was overshadowed. If citizens don’t have the benefit of the whole truth, the notion of self-government is meaningless.

Even though you have all in some sense inherited the current project, you have an ongoing responsibility to evaluate the findings of my efforts to establish what took place – and the people of Bedford have a right to know the project’s back story. When what I share with the Board is never mentioned – let alone discussed – at your meetings, and therefore is never reported in *The Bedford Citizen*, people are justified in believing there is nothing to it.

People assume that their elected representatives will share the big picture with them, not just an official account. If Board members are sure that the project is being built on a worthy foundation and that public support is strong, why haven't you been willing to test that belief? I realize the template for treating my reports to you as delusional and frivolous was set by Sarah Stanton, but it can't continue. If only the Board had discussed the issues I've raised and had addressed the questions I've asked, an informed town dialogue would have resulted, and the project would have been belatedly vetted instead of being automatically executed.

I have spent three years rigorously documenting what was clear to many Bedford residents from the beginning: **the people were left out of the site selection of 139 The Great Road for the new station. And, apparently, so was the Select Board until the time came to make an offer!**

In August of 2021, Sarah Stanton told Mike Rosenberg: "We have a plan that we will be bringing before town meeting..." Really? Based on what deliberations? What she really was saying is "I have a plan..." As I have shared with you, **information I received from Utah State as the result of numerous Freedom of Information requests provides indisputable proof that the timeline in the Town's official presentation includes materially false statements.**

I am confident that the evidence I have presented implicating Sarah Stanton in a headstrong scheme to defraud the people of Bedford of the protections of the democratic process is airtight. But what matters most is that the people are still in the dark about the underpinnings of the project instead of clearly understanding what is going on – as if they are children who need to be protected and guided for their own good. **Therefore, I encourage you to examine and evaluate the validity of your own assumptions – beginning with the following fallacies that are routinely repeated by officials even though they are not true:**

#### **THE PROJECT IS THE RESULT OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS – False**

It is of course true that a Town Meeting vote is one cornerstone of the democratic process – as are informed consent and secret ballots (when voting on matters of controversy and/or major bonding initiatives.) **The basis for claiming that the voters were not given an impartial or balanced presentation of the true choices is now a matter of public record.**

#### **THE PEOPLE VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY FOR THE LOCATION – False**

Two-thirds of the 398 voters in attendance met the legal threshold for a bonding vote. If the vote had been by secret ballot due to the inflamed rhetoric, it is reasonable to believe that three votes were in play. The article passed by what *The Bedford Citizen* reported was "the slimmest of margins." If the Moderator had called for a recount instead of rushing on to the next article, the result could have been that the measure actually failed. **To routinely claim that the people voted "overwhelmingly" for the project is false – and discounts one-third of the voters who did not support the site at the ATM or in any subsequent vote.**

### **THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE TOWN IS IN FAVOR OF THE PROJECT – Not Known**

Until the 10,000 people who did not vote for the project are heard from, there is nothing on which to base this claim. Especially since there has been virtually no discussion of the issues that I and others have raised since March 2022 to determine their validity. Allowing rational objections to be ignored by the Town and angrily denounced by two or three dozen people in comments on Facebook or Letters to *The Bedford Citizen* suggests a whistling-past-the-graveyard strategy. **If the issues raised had been addressed head-on and refuted with facts, that would have conveyed confidence that the plan really did have wide support.**

### **THE PROJECT WOULD SAVE A WHOLE LOT OF MONEY AND A WHOLE LOT OF TIME – False**

In the Select Board's video recommendation for the 2022 Annual Town Meeting, Emily Mitchell assured voters that building the new fire station at 139 The Great Road would save Bedford residents "a whole lot of money and a whole lot of time." Apparently, the Board members believed whatever the Town Manager told them. Executive Session minutes at the end of 2021 record that every member of the Select Board and Chief Grunes had significant misgivings about the site but reconciled them under the cost-savings rationale. It was very good luck for Sarah Stanton and very bad luck for Bedford that the one professional builder on the Select Board was an abutter.

At Town Meeting on March 29, 2022, the comments of those supporting the project clearly showed that their votes were based on the economy of the selection (as were those of the Town Committees that recommended it) and the promise that it was the quickest route to a new station. But HDC approval was always likely to take more time and the outcome was always less certain than an eminent domain process – while building at the Bedford Motel site would have checked all the boxes and taken much less time. In fact, a meeting with the HDC commissioners shortly before the ATM vote showed they were very interested in that option – which clearly infuriated Sarah Stanton.

**In fact, there was no conceivable basis for the time-saving and money-saving claim. None. When residents who knew that voiced their opposition it should have been debated instead of dismissed and ridiculed. Now, a year and a half after the HDC vote, Don Corey's warnings regarding the wires and other drawbacks have proven well-founded. When compared to "any other site," he advised, "139 The Great Road is not the bargain it's been represented to be." And that is still true.**

### **THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION VOTE APPROVED THE PLAN – Not Really**

When the HDC voted on January 3, 2024, to deny the Town a Certificate of Appropriateness, the commissioners had 45 days to explain the basis of their denial. When the Commission met on February 7, 2024, in response to the Town's request for reconsideration, based upon a major redesign of the facility, the three commissioners who had denied the certificate shared their

reasoning. Each one gave their specific reasons and explained that while everyone wanted a new fire station, their central consideration had to be evaluating the tradeoffs in light of their duty to uphold the words and purpose of the enabling legislative Act.

Above all, they each voiced a problem with the overpowering scale of the project. But even though Commissioner Canciello explained that “I’m still distressed at the size of the building relative to all the structures near it,” he voted to change his January vote without providing a reason. **If the Historic District is to have any integrity, then just as the Commission has to provide the basis for denials, a commissioner should be required to explain reversing a previous vote – particularly since the overriding impediment had not changed. The Town should be as concerned as I am with the appearance of encouraging and condoning nullification of the controlling legislative Act.**

### **RECONSIDERING THE PROJECT WOULD BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE FIREFIGHTERS AND TO THE PUBLIC GOOD – False**

As outlined in my July 9<sup>th</sup> letter, reconsidering the project at this time would actually represent a tremendous net benefit for the people of Bedford. And ongoing improvements to the infrastructure of the surrounding public property would not be wasted. The advantages of building the Fire Station Headquarters on the American Legion property, upgrading the current station for use as a substation, and building a beautiful new Legion Hall at 139 TGR, steps away from Veterans Memorial Park, cannot be overstated. As I explained, when I ran the idea past someone who is eminently qualified to judge the feasibility of the plan I was told that it “certainly has merit.”

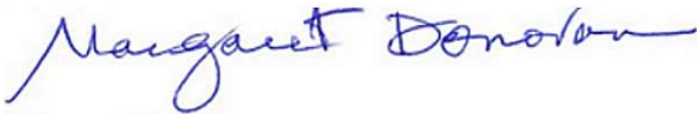
I will not repeat the many advantages that are outlined in “A Better Plan” but want to point out that the aim of the rallying cry to give the firefighters what they want and need is only partially achieved by a new station. Until the substation that they have repeatedly called for in Town Meeting comments, online letters, and public statements is a reality, the possible loss of life that results when seconds matter will be a burden they should not have to bear.

Ironically, locating the new station at 139 The Great Road will almost certainly prolong the substation’s time in political limbo. And this will probably be the only chance the people will ever have to bracket The Great Road with two stations for the price of one, preserving the function of the traditional station, while not only extending protection to underserved residents and taxpayers. but improving coverage to half the town at the same time!

Firefighter Tom Piccirillo made a very moving plea at the 2022 Annual Town Meeting. Don Corey wrote a letter to *The Bedford Citizen* prior to the 2022 Special Town Meeting strongly urging that the new station and the substation need to be considered together. And Michael Seibert delivered a beautifully researched presentation on the underlying need at the 2024 Annual Town Meeting. **Please use your imaginations. It is time to stop pooh-poohing the need for a substation as unaffordable and not worth considering when nothing could be further from the truth.**

I urge the Select Board to discuss “The Bottom Line” and “A Better Plan” at your next regular meeting. I hope you will either dispute these findings with facts or explain why they don’t matter. I do not believe they can be ignored without harming the public good.

Sincerely,



Margaret Donovan

P.S. I plan to follow up as soon as time permits with questions that Sarah Stanton should be required to answer. I understand she has left her position in the Healey Administration. If you will provide me with her contact information I will ask her for answers myself. In any event, since State officials in the Inspector General’s and Attorney General’s Offices were not willing to hold her to account for her actions, I will do my best to locate someone in the media who will – someone who will share the cautionary tale of how much damage one person’s arrogance and malfeasance can do. The abuse of power and disrespect for the democratic process would be bad anywhere. But for those who cherish the heritage of the Bedford Flag fluttering at the dawn of American independence, the dishonest way this project was conceived and enforced has been a terrible affront.

P.P.S. Richard Hughes and I appreciated Mr. Mortenson’s willingness to let us speak at last Monday’s meeting. But I would like to explain that I made sure at the beginning of all these efforts and comments that they are permitted under State law. If Bedford has a by-law against non-residents sharing their input on local matters, I am not aware of it. Except when it would involve a time burden due to many local commenters, I believe it is in the town’s best interests to welcome thoughtful input from anyone who cares and wishes to speak.

Copies to:

Matthew J. Hanson, Town Manager | Chief James Bailey | Captain Mark Sullivan | Lieutenant Mark Daly | Captain Scott Ricker | Captain John Daniels | Fire Station Building Committee Chair Jeff Cohen | Bedford Historic District Commissioners

Elizabeth Hacala | President, Board of Directors, *The Bedford Citizen*